

# Welcome to Congress: A Diagram of How a Bill Becomes a Law

## HOW DOES A BILL BECOME A LAW?

This chart is a helpful tool for understanding the legislative process of how a bill becomes a law in Congress. Although the chart does not show how important each section is in the process, the most important part of the work is done within the committees.

Most of the time, a bill is introduced in the House before it makes its way to the Senate. For example, any bill dealing with money must be first introduced in the House. Nevertheless, the chart is an accurate account of a bill's journey through Congress prior to its becoming a law.

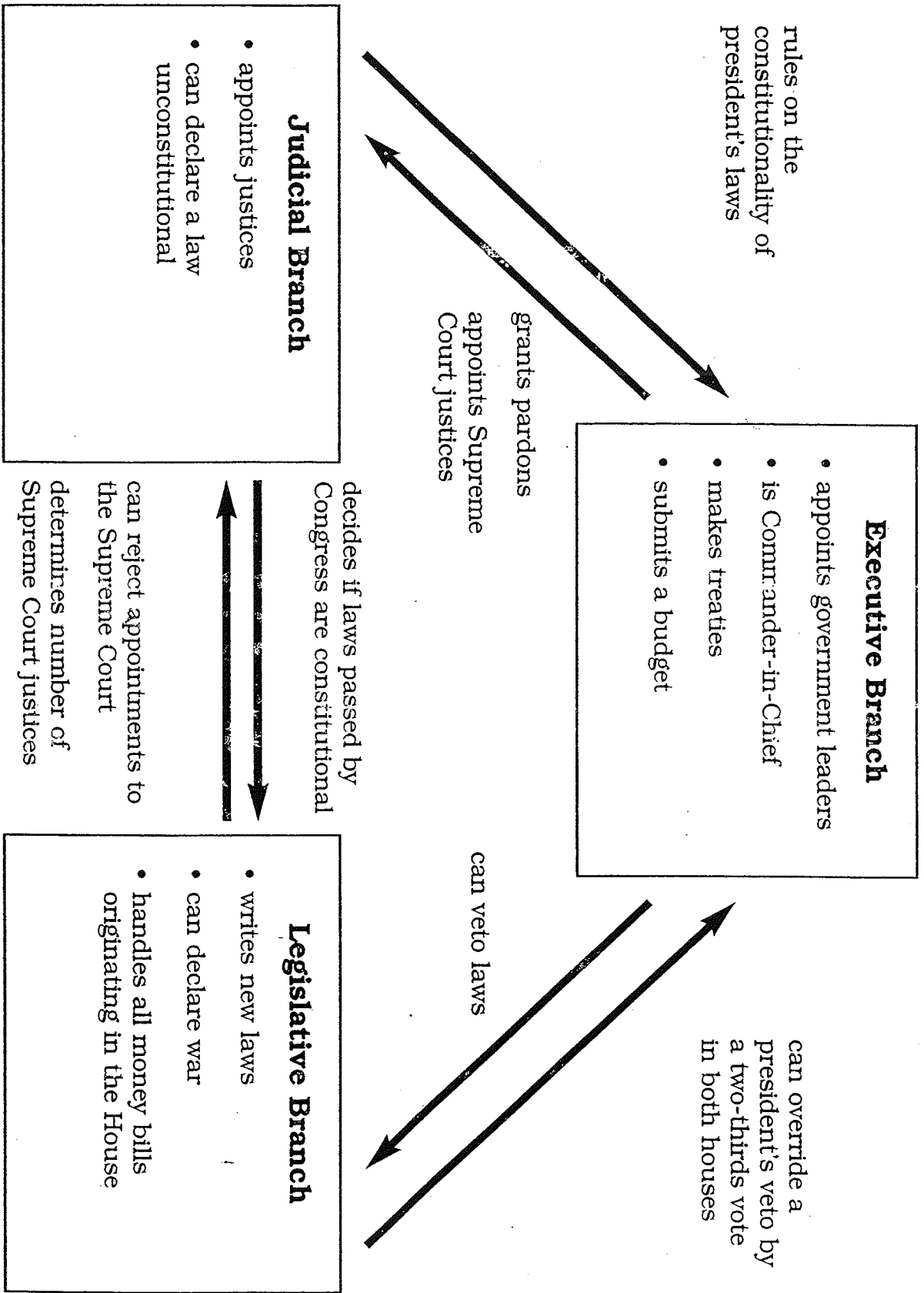
### The Senate

### The House of Representatives

|                                  |          |                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Bill is Introduced</b>        | <b>1</b> | The bill is introduced in the House. It is assigned a number.                                                                                                                | The bill is introduced in the Senate. It is assigned a number.                                                              |
|                                  | <b>2</b> | The bill is sent to the appropriate committee in the House.                                                                                                                  | The bill is sent to the appropriate committee in the Senate.                                                                |
| <b>Committee Hearings</b>        | <b>3</b> | The committee holds (public or closed) hearings.                                                                                                                             | The committee holds (public or closed) hearings.                                                                            |
| <b>Debates on the Floor</b>      | <b>4</b> | Representatives debate and vote.                                                                                                                                             | Senators debate and vote.                                                                                                   |
| <b>Conference Committee</b>      | <b>5</b> | Some members from both the House and Senate now form a new conference committee to negotiate and rewrite those parts of the bill that are not in agreement.                  |                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Houses Vote on Bill</b>       | <b>6</b> | Representatives vote on the renegotiated bill. (Both the House and the Senate must pass the bill before it goes to the president.)                                           | Senators vote on the renegotiated bill. (Both the House and the Senate must pass the bill before it goes to the president.) |
| <b>Bill is Sent to President</b> | <b>7</b> | A. The president's signature, indicating approval, makes the bill a law.                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Bill Becomes a Law</b>        |          | B. The president can veto the bill, but the bill can still become a law if it is passed by a two-thirds vote of both the House and the Senate. This is called an "override." |                                                                                                                             |
|                                  |          | C. If the bill is neither signed nor vetoed by the president, it automatically becomes a law after 10 days.                                                                  |                                                                                                                             |

# A DIAGRAM OF CHECKS AND BALANCES

The government was designed so that no one branch would overpower the other two branches. Each branch had its own powers and would also be able to "check" the powers of the other two, or "balance" the powers the others had.



A Diagram of Checks and Balances